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VASSAR COLLEGE

January 5, 1965

TO: Members of the College Community
FROM: Faculty Science Club
SUBJECT: Lecture on Computers by Theodor Nelson, Instructor in Sociology
8:00 p.m. Wednesday, January 27 - The Aula

The Faculty Science Club is pleased to sponsor the talk described below for the benefit of all members of the College community interested in learning more about uses of the computer in the academic environment.

COMPUTERS, CREATIVITY, AND THE NATURE OF THE WRITTEN WORD

No special background is necessary to understand this; indeed, "special" background may well be detrimental.

Everybody's misimpression of electronic computers -- a misimpression peculiarly acute among "computer people" -- continues to restrict the general use of computers to essentially numerical tasks. Inherently these machines have far broader capacities; the limits are not of technology, but of imagination.

This talk will first describe the structure and generality of the stored-program digital computer. The computer is NOT mathematical: if it is the most perfect adding machine, it is also the most perfect typewriter, electric train control, filing cabinet, movie projector, and musical instrument. But whole new attitudes will be needed, and liberal-arts personages will have to learn to program, before computers can make their real contribution to civilization.

The speaker will describe his own experiments in this direction -- trying to build "systems" for the handling of creative (and academic) materials -- ideas, words, and other things. A succession of approaches, and their increasing generality, will be explained.

The philosophic consequences of all this are very grave. Our concepts of "reading", "writing", and "book" fall apart, and we are challenged to design "hyperfiles" and write "hypertexts" that may have more teaching power than anything that could ever be printed on paper.

Please feel free to invite any interested students.

Sue Lumb, President
Robert Rehwold, Vice-President
Stanley Novak, Secretary